

**“Do You Know What It Means to Be a Woman?”: Negotiating Kemalism and State  
Feminism During the Transition to a Multi-Party Republic in Turkey**

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B.A. in History, May 2010, Quinnipiac University

A Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of  
Columbian College of Arts and Sciences  
of The George Washington University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

May 19, 2013

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## Abstract of Thesis

### “Do You Know What It Means To Be a Woman?”: Negotiating Kemalism and State Feminism During the Transition to a Multi-Party Republic in Turkey

Historians emerging out of the proliferation of Western feminist movements in the 1980s and 1990s in Turkey have generally agreed upon a periodization of the history of Turkish women’s movements that is divided into three periods: the late Ottoman; the early Republic; and the 1980s. By analyzing the discourse surrounding women’s labor in *Kadın Gazetesi*, a biweekly women’s newspaper, this thesis proposes that women were active in contesting their role in the Turkish civic order in the period between the late 1940s and the middle of the 1950s. That this was the peak of the Democratic Party’s popularity in Turkey is significant; this thesis argues that women’s opinions should not be read outside of the wider intellectual milieu that increasingly looked critically at Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Republican People’s Party.

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## Introduction

“So far, we have been using our will to support certain principles which had been decided for us beforehand. This was the only way to carry on during an evolution. Today, the will of the nation is manifested in a progressive democratic atmosphere of greater freedom and liberty. Consequently, we are now charged with the responsibility of using our own true opinions to safeguard the principles of our Evolution.”<sup>1</sup>

So proclaimed İffet Halim Oruz, owner and editor of the biweekly newspaper, *Kadın Gazetesi*, in April 1950, roughly three weeks before the 1950 Turkish elections. The 1950 elections marked the first time since the Turkish Republic’s formation in 1923 that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s Republican People’s Party (RPP) lost control over the country’s government. According to one historian, the victory of the Democratic Party (DP), which allowed it to win the overwhelming majority of seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, “paved the way for an important transformation of both bureaucratic and cultural structures” in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> As Oruz articulated the emergence of a multiparty system meant, to her, that individuals did not have to be constrained by predetermined principles and could use their own agency to further the ongoing “evolution” of Turkey.

This optimism surrounding the rise of the Democratic Party was ephemeral, as the party’s government was toppled in 1960 by a military coup. By the late 1980s, Oruz’s confidence in the future of the multiparty Republic appears to have faded from memory. In order to celebrate the opening of the *Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfi* (Women’s Library and Information Center Foundation), an institution that seeks to “understand the presence of women in history, offer proper information to women

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<sup>1</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, “National Preponderancy,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, April 24, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Şerif Demir, “Celal Bayar’ın Cumhurbaşkanı Seçilmesi ve Demokrat Parti Hükümetinin Kurulması (1950),” *History Studies: International Journal of History* 4, no. 2 (July 2012): 121.

researchers and preserve today's written documents for future generations,”<sup>3</sup> a number of librarians and scholars held a conference in Istanbul in 1991 to discuss the state of feminist scholarship and resources available to assist the study of women’s history. Şirin Tekeli, a prominent political scientist and one of the scholars at the forefront of the Turkish feminist movement in the 1980s,<sup>4</sup> argued at the event that “once Atatürk’s ‘women’s revolution’ was over, the one-party authoritarian regime repressed the women’s movement like all other grassroots movements...Women’s past history became invisible, feminism was forgotten and remained so, until the early 1980s.”<sup>5</sup> How did such a periodization that posits a linear progression of history with “self-evident turning points,” to use one historian’s characterization,<sup>6</sup> come to dominate the historiography of Turkish feminism?

Since Tekeli’s presentation in 1991, few critical evaluations have surfaced to challenge the historical trajectory of Turkish feminism she proposed.<sup>7</sup> Tekeli argued that there were three stages to Turkish feminism, which informs her claims about the history of women’s movements in Turkey. The first, which she suggested reached its zenith during the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, was marked by women’s tendency to question their place in society by challenging the legitimacy of their traditionally ascribed roles as

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.kadineserleri.org/en/vakif\\_hakkinda.asp](http://www.kadineserleri.org/en/vakif_hakkinda.asp)

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of Tekeli’s professional and academic careers, see Katharina Knaus, “Turkish Women: A Century of Change,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> Şirin Tekeli, “Women’s Library & Information Center,” in *Kadınların Belleği: Proceedings of The International Symposium of Women’s Libraries* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1992): 262-3.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Bentley, “Cross-Cultural Interaction and Periodization in World History,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 3 (June 1996): 749.

<sup>7</sup> Works that endorse such a periodization include Yeşim Arat, “Women’s Movement of the 1980s in Turkey: Radical Outcome of Liberal Kemalism?” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Yeşim Arat, “From Emancipation to Liberation: The Changing Role of Women in Turkey’s Public Realm,” *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2000); and Serpil Çakır, “Feminism and Feminist History-Writing in Turkey: The Discovery of Ottoman Feminism,” *Aspasia* 1 (2007).

wives and mothers.<sup>8</sup> This particular generation was cognizant of both foreign feminist movements, of the domestic goals of modernizing bureaucratic elites, and of the nationalist movement that was emerging in response to the fear of an empire declining.<sup>9</sup> Less than a decade later, the outbreak of the First World War also provided women with a degree of access to the public realm: women organized popular meetings, gave speeches to the Turkish public, and helped establish Defense of Rights organizations during the war.<sup>10</sup> In her detailed study of women's movements from 1908 to 1918, Serpil Atamaz-Hazar further suggests that serious demands for gender equality began with the revolution of 1908, and that although legal rights for women were not codified until the

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<sup>8</sup> Şirin Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (London: Zed Books, 1995): 11. See also Elizabeth Frierson, "Unimagined Communities: State, Press, and Gender in the Hamidian Era" (PhD Diss., Princeton University, 1996); Serpil Atamaz-Hazar, "'The Hands That Rock the Cradle Will Rise': Women, Gender, and the Revolution in Ottoman Turkey (1908-1918)" (PhD Diss., The University of Arizona, 2010); Nicole A.N.M. Van Os, "Ottoman Women Organizations: Sources of the Past, Sources for the Future," *Islam and Christian-Muslims Relations*, 11, no. 3 (2000): 369-383; Tülay Keskin, "Feminist/Nationalist Discourse in the First Year of the Ottoman Revolutionary Press (1908-1909): Readings from the Magazines of *Demet*, *Mehasin*, and *Kadin* (Salonica)" (MA Thesis, Bilkent University, 2003); Palmira Brummett, "Dressing for a Revolution: Mother, Nation, Citizen, and Subversive in the Ottoman Satirical Press, 1908-1911," in *Deconstructing Images of "The Turkish Woman"*, ed. Zehra Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999); and Aynur Demirdirek, "In Pursuit of the Ottoman Women's Movement," trans. Zehra Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999) for general discussions of women's movements in the late Ottoman Empire; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Slave Girls, Temptresses, and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel," *Gender Issues* 8, no. 35 (Spring 1988) for representations of women during the Tanzimat period; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Women and the Turkish State: Political Actors or Symbolic Pawns?" in *Woman, Nation, State*, eds. Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989): 129-133 for a brief discussion of "the woman question" in the Tanzimat period; Alexander Safarian, "On the History of Turkish Feminism," *Iran and the Caucasus* 11 (2007): 142-146 for a brief overview of female Tanzimat literary figures; Derya Iner, "Halide Edib Adivar's Role as Social Reformer and Contributor to Public Debate on Constitutionalism, Status of Women, Educational Reform, Ottoman Minorities, and Nationalism During the Young Turk Era (1908-1918)" (PhD Diss., University of Madison-Wisconsin, 2011) and Şahika Karaca, "Fatma Aliye Hanım'ın Türk Kadın Haklarının Düşünsel Temellerine Katkıları," *Karadeniz Araştırmaları* 31 (Autumn 2011): 93-110 for detailed accounts of the roles of two prominent female figures of the late Ottoman Period.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Şirin Tekeli, "The Rise and Change of the New Women's Movement: Emergence of the Feminist Movement in Turkey," in *The New Women's Movement: Feminism and Political Power in Europe and the USA*, ed. Drude Dahlerup (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1986): 183.

1930s, the revolutionary period “exerted a tremendous social and cultural impact on all strata of society, above all women.”<sup>11</sup>

Tekeli’s second stage, occurring during the formative years of the Turkish Republic, witnessed the “grassroots” movement of the late Ottoman era give way to state feminism, a system whereby the state appropriated issues related to women and women’s rights into its own core ideology.<sup>12</sup> By granting women a more visible presence in the public sphere, for example, the state could utilize their improved status as a barometer for its own progress. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself was greatly invested in this project. He averred in 1923 that:

Our enemies claim that Turkey cannot be considered a civilized nation, because she consists of two separate parts, men and women. Can we shut our eyes to one portion of a group, while advancing the other and still bring progress to the whole

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<sup>11</sup> Atamaz-Hazar, “‘The Hands That Rock the Cradle Will Rise,’” 9.

<sup>12</sup> Şirin Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, 12. Literature on this particular segment of Turkish history is plentiful. On the relationship between women and Kemalist reforms, see Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Women in the Developing World: Evidence From Turkey*, Monograph Series in World Affairs, vol. 22 (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1986); Danielle Van Dobben, “Dancing Modernity: Gender, Sexuality and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic” (MA Thesis, The University of Arizona, 2008); Ferhunde Özbay, introduction to *Women, Family, and Social Change in Turkey*, ed. Ferhunde Özbay (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1990); Nezihe Muhittin, *Türk Kadını* (İstanbul: Nümune Matbaası, 1931); Parveen Shaukat Ali, *Status of Women in the Muslim World: A Study of the Feminist Movements in Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan* (Lahore: Aziz Publishers, 1975); Deniz Kandiyoti, “End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey,” *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan, 1991); Deniz Kandiyoti, “Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case,” *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1987). On education during this period, see Elif Ekin Akşit, “Girls’ Education and the Paradoxes of Modernity and Nationalism in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic” (PhD Diss., State University of New York Binghamton, 2004), Zehra Arat, “Educating the Daughters of the Republic,” in *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Woman,”* ed. Zehra F. Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999), and Fatma Gök, “Türkiye’de Eğitim ve Kadınlar,” in *Kadın Bakış Açısından: 1980’ler Türkiye’sinde Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1990). On sartorial regulations, see Jenny White, “State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman,” *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2003); Nora Şeni, “19. Yüzyıl Sonunda İstanbul Mizah Basınında Moda ve Kadın Kıyafetleri,” in *Kadın Bakış Açısından: 1980’ler Türkiye’sinde Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1990); and Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*. On the divide between the public and private sectors, see Kıvanç Kılınç, “Constructing Women for the Republic: The Spatial Politics of Gender, Class, and Domesticity in Ankara, 1928-1952” (PhD Diss., State University of New York Binghamton, 2010); Selda Şerifsoy, “Aile ve Kemalist Modernizasyon Projesi, 1928-1951,” in *Vatan, Millet, Kadınlar*, ed. Ayşe Gül Altınay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000); Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), especially chapters 4 and 5; and Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility 1880-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).



group? The road of progress must be trodden by both sexes together, marching arm in arm.<sup>13</sup>

To Tekeli and likeminded scholars, state sponsored nationalism figures heavily in the Kemalist modernization project, as women were encouraged to enter the public sphere in order to fully help serve the nation. Nilüfer Göle describes this as a type of bargain for women; they were “both the ‘savers’ and the ‘saved’ ones: they were expected to save the republican reforms from ‘degeneration,’ while these reforms, in turn, saved them from the fanaticism of Islam.”<sup>14</sup> Women were thus expected to show loyalty to the secular state for affording them this opportunity to enter into a ‘modern’ (public) sphere.<sup>15</sup>

The third stage of Turkish feminism took root in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> Though left wing movements gained traction during the 1970s,<sup>17</sup> Tekeli argued that it was only after the 1980 military coup that feminism could truly ferment in Turkey.<sup>18</sup> She described this movement as “one of the most avant-garde formations during the 1980s.”<sup>19</sup> It facilitated

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Aysu Gelgeç Gürpınar, “Women in the Twentieth Century: Modernity, Feminism, and Islam in Turkey” (MA Thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006): 42.

<sup>14</sup> Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Şirin Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Yeşim Arat specifically cites February 4, 1983, the day on which an influential article written by Şule Torun in the literary magazine, *Somut*, about gender as a social construction that transcends “the anatomical” as the date that “introduced feminism in Turkey.” Arat, “Women’s Movements of the 1980s in Turkey,” 100. For other discussions of this period, see Şirin Tekeli, “1980’ler Türkiye’inde Kadınlar,” in *Kadın Bakış Açısından: 1980’ler Türkiye’inde Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1990); Ramazan Gülemdam, “The Development of a Feminist Discourse and Feminist Writing in Turkey: 1970-1990,” *Kadın 2000* 2, no. 1 (2000): 93-116; Gul Muhsine Aldikacti, “Framing, Culture, and Social Movements: A Comparison of Feminist and Islamist Women’s Movements in Turkey” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001), 44-53; Arzu Öztürkmen, “A Short History of *Kadınca* Magazine and its Feminism,” in *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Woman,”* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999); Yeşim Arat, “Feminist Institutions and Democratic Aspirations: The Case of the Purple Roof Women’s Shelter Foundation,” in *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Woman,”* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999); and Nükhet Sirman, “Feminism in Turkey: A Short History,” *New Perspective on Turkey* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 15-27.

<sup>17</sup> On this development, see Igor P. Lipovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Turkey, 1960-1980* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), especially parts II and III.

<sup>18</sup> For discussions of the 1980 coup’s effects in Turkey more generally, see Gerassimos Karabelias, “The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in Post-War Turkey, 1980-95,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (October 1999): 130-151 and Ihsan Dağı, “Democratic Transition in Turkey, 1980-83: The Impact of European Diplomacy,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 2 (April 1996): 124-141.

<sup>19</sup> Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, 13.

the democratization of Turkish society by furthering integrating women into public life while at the same time addressing concerns that existed in the private sphere. Yeşim Arat describes the women of this period as “defiant daughters of the older generation” who “demanded liberty,” in contrast to the women before who ostensibly did not or did not sufficiently make similar demands.<sup>20</sup> It was in the 1980s that scholars openly articulated the critique that Turkish state feminism made women “‘almost’ equal”<sup>21</sup> and that Kemalist reforms were, to use Nilüfer Göle’s terms, “‘given’ not ‘taken.’”<sup>22</sup> To such scholars, women “served as an ideological lever” for nationalist state ideology, rather than as independent agents effecting change on their own terms.<sup>23</sup>

Tekeli outlined a few of the most relevant characteristics of this period: its willingness to confront issues that Turkish women faced in the private sphere; its relative distance from political parties and class divides; a proliferation of salons and women’s organizations, each of which enjoyed a degree of independence from the state; and the assertion that feminism would not be subsumed by any other ideology (notably, socialism).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Arat, “From Emancipation to Liberation,” 107.

<sup>21</sup> Şirin Tekeli, “The Meaning and Limits of Feminist Ideology in Turkey,” in *Women, Family, and Social Change in Turkey*, ed. Ferhunde Özbay (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1990): 144.

<sup>22</sup> Göle, *The Forbidden Modern*, 144, note 27 (though she, herself, disagrees with Kandiyoti on this point). Other examples of critiques include Şirin Tekeli, “Women in Turkish Politics,” in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Tekeli, “The Meaning and Limits of Feminist Ideology;” Tekeli, “The Rise and Change of the New Women’s Movement;” Deniz Kandiyoti, “Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991); Kandiyoti, “Emancipated but Unliberated?;” Kandiyoti, “Women and the Turkish State;” Ayşe Öncü, “Turkish Women in the Professions: Why So Many?” in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Kılınç, “Constructing Women for the Republic;” Arat, “From Emancipation to Liberation;” and Durakbaşa, “Kemalism as Identity Politics.”

<sup>23</sup> Kandiyoti, “Women and the Turkish State,” 143. One specific example of this was the state’s use of women as a way to show Western states that Turkey was not a dictatorship. If women were allowed to vote, for example, then Turkey had to be different from European states that had not yet granted women the right to vote.

<sup>24</sup> Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, 13-15.

These three stages mark the points of rupture in the dominant paradigm of women's movements in Turkey. The points at which change occurred are clearly identified around these points, which leaves little room for ebbs and flows of opinion in intermittent stages. Change is measured in reference to the extent to which women openly rejected the patriarchal structure imposed by state feminism. While women in the 1980s were "defiant daughters," women under the early Republic were "symbolic pawns" of the state, to use Turkish scholar Deniz Kandiyoti's words.<sup>25</sup> How can this be countenanced with Oruz's argument that Turkey was in the midst of a slower "evolution" of public thought?

### **Rethinking Periodization and State Feminism**

The main object of this study is to reconsider some of the underlying assumptions in Tekeli's periodization. Turkish women's movements need to be understood more as a layered phenomenon that developed over the *longue durée* of Turkish history. In the paradigmatic periodization of women's movements between roughly 1938, the year of Atatürk's death, and 1983, women's activity is presented as existing in a state of abeyance. This is insufficient for capturing the complexities of women's experiences in the Republic, for evidence shows that women's discourse in the late 1940s and early 1950s went beyond the sole objective of protecting the status quo, as they are thought to have been.<sup>26</sup> They demonstrated flexibility in their engagement of questions related to women's place in Turkish social and political life, though often in far more subtle, yet

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<sup>25</sup> Kandiyoti, "Women and the Turkish State," 139. Also see Ayşe Durakbaşa, "Kemalism as Identity Politics in Turkey," in *Deconstructing Images of the "Turkish Woman,"* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: Palgrave, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Tekeli, introduction to *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, 12.

still significant, ways. Though they did not develop an alternative model for gender relations and subjectivity like women in the 1980s did, women in the period under study used the discursive space available to them to make claims that would better their position in the civic order. The dichotomous comparison between the early Republic and the 1980s erases the “evolution” which Oruz claimed was occurring in Turkey and the more subtle ways that women were able to find space to offer arguments before the 1980s. As Ellen Fleischmann warns, many women activists who were part of women’s movements did not necessarily conceive of themselves as “feminists,” and certainly not feminists in the context of North American feminism that future Turkish women would come to associate themselves with.<sup>27</sup> Just as the Democratic Party’s platform was not a radical departure from Kemalism, women in the late 1940s and early 1950s also worked within the language of Kemalism to advance claims. The Democratic Party’s emphasis on democracy and freedom of expression<sup>28</sup> offered a space through which these arguments could be made; this study will demonstrate that claims were indeed being made and need to be understood as such. To the women living during the transition to a multiparty system, trying to shape the civic order they were ensconced in did not necessarily also have to mean rejecting Kemalism. It was possible to ground oneself in the language of Kemalism without unquestionably accepting all of its tenets. This study will illuminate the strategies that women used in this regard and argue that women’s understanding of state feminism, from the establishment of the Republic to the 1980s, should be considered far more fluid. The 1980s should not be conceived of as a result of a

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<sup>27</sup> Ellen Fleischmann, “The Other ‘Awakening’: The Emergence of Women’s Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940,” in *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*, ed. Karen Offen (New York: Routledge, 2010): 171.

<sup>28</sup> See Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, “The Democratic Party, 1946-1960,” in *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*, eds. Martin Heger and Jacob M. Landau (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991): 125-128.

new direct rejection of the policies of the early Republic, but rather as the culmination of a much longer historical trajectory of thought about state feminism.

That these developments occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s is of crucial importance. Scholars' failure to situate women's movements into this critical juncture of Republican history is what largely informs the prevailing periodization. This may stem from a teleological reading of history. We know that the Democratic Party, formed in 1946 by a cadre of ex-Republican People's Party (Atatürk's party) members, eventually pursued far more repressive policies towards after it came to power in the 1950 and again won overwhelmingly in the elections of 1954.<sup>29</sup> It was later ousted by a military coup in 1960, after Turkey's economic situation worsened and the DP continued to stifle internal dissent within the party and curtailed the press's freedom. From this, one might surmise that its message in the late 1940s and early 1950s that espoused democracy and individual subjectivity was empty rhetoric and was understood by the people living in the 1940s and 1950s to be empty. But such a reading overlooks the dire economic conditions that post-World War II Turkey found itself in, which led to what Feroz Ahmad characterized as a "seething undercurrent of popular hostility" towards the RPP.<sup>30</sup>

This hostility provided an outlet for individuals to express their disapproval with the ruling party at a historical moment when popular loyalty to the ruling party was waning and, for many individuals, their political identification was in flux. The Democratic Party provided individuals a channel through which their "increasing

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<sup>29</sup> Examples include restricting the press's freedom; amending the electoral law so that a candidate rejected by one party could not run for another in the next election cycle; forbidding opposition parties from compiling joint lists; outlawing opposition parties from using state radio; and allowing itself the ability to terminate civil servants with more than twenty-five years of experience or who were older than sixty. Sarıbay, "The Democratic Party," 126.

<sup>30</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 105.

misgivings [with] the strengthening of one-party rule” could be articulated.<sup>31</sup> Women, in some instances, appropriated Kemalist discourse to make claims against the state by arguing that it had not lived up to the promises it had guaranteed them. Such instances were not necessarily indicative of women’s complacency with their place in the Turkish civic order and with the rights that were bestowed upon them under Kemalism. Rather, they serve as a sign that they were aware of both the potential applicability of such rights and the state’s failure to adequately guarantee they be carried out. Women acted as rational subjects making choices about when and in what context to utilize state discourse. As Erik Jan Zürcher has said of Kemalism more broadly, it “remained a *flexible concept* and people with widely different worldviews have been able to call themselves Kemalist.”<sup>32</sup> Women could therefore still claim to be acting within the parameters of the fledgling Republic’s core ideology while negotiating and contesting its meaning. While they may not have outright *rejected* Kemalism and the state as a whole and developed their own alternative framework for the Turkish civic order, there were many ways to work within the dominant framework without being whole subjugated by it.

Laura Bier’s analysis of how scholars of Nasserist Egypt have conceived of women’s relationship to the state is also relevant in the Turkish context:

“Most scholars have assumed that with the consolidation of military rule and the imposition of a one-party system, *politics ceased to occur at all but the highest levels of government* within the framework of the state, understood as a set of legal institutions set apart from Egyptian society. What such studies leave out are

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<sup>31</sup> Kemal Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959): 139.

<sup>32</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, third edition (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009): 181 (emphasis added).

the countless struggles to define the content and meaning of the Nasserist project that occurred in other areas.”<sup>33</sup>

Here Bier reminds us that contestation need not only occur at the highest level of politics, even in a scenario where the state is a powerful one. Indeed, individuals acting through channels that are not necessarily related to the state have ample opportunity to influence how others think about themselves, the state, and the relationship between the self and the state. When scholars like Arat argue that “women of one generation who, figuratively, owed their existence to Atatürk came to be challenged by a younger generation that radically criticized him,”<sup>34</sup> there is an implicit assumption that the latter was, at best, not defiant *enough*, and at worst, did not challenge the state on any level. It also creates a false dichotomy where one either must be overtly critical of the state or, in the absence of such criticism, must fully endorse the state and its platforms. One of the central points of this study is that women were able to coopt the state’s own discourse of equality and hold it accountable for what they perceived to be shortcomings in the extent to which these promises were actualized. The concept of “defiance” should not be read only as defiance to the patriarchal tenets of the state’s program for women, but also as the ways in which women worked within existing social and political structures to advance their own claims.

Critical to the story of women’s movements in Turkey is the role that state feminism played in shaping the state’s policies towards women as well as the discursive fields on which debates about the role of women were carried out. The term “state

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<sup>33</sup> Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012): 4 (emphasis added).

<sup>34</sup> Yeşim Arat, “The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey,” in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997): 96.

feminism” was first coined by students of the welfare state in Scandinavian countries and was used by Tekeli in the 1980s to describe the Kemalist program for women. In the broadest sense, according to Mervat Hatem, in her study of state feminism in the Egyptian context, “it refers to ambitious state programs that introduce important changes in the reproductive and productive roles of women.”<sup>35</sup> In the Scandinavian case, the term described to the government’s desire to combat structural causes of gender inequality; Scandinavian countries sought to increase the number of women working in the public sector and to bring reproduction out of the private sphere and into the public sphere. Scandinavian welfare states, to those who championed the state as an agent of reform, provided an example of how structural inequalities and the marginalization of women born of patriarchy could be corrected through legislation.<sup>36</sup> Critics have insisted that a state-centric approach could not adequately address the problems of women’s underrepresentation, discrimination, and subordination.<sup>37</sup> These same issues were also pervasive in Turkey.

Until the mid-1980s, many scholars (who themselves were beneficiaries of Kemalism) praised the reforms that were part of the Turkish state feminist policy. Tezer Taşkıran, a school principal at Ankara Kız Lisesi (Ankara Girls’ High School) from 1930-1931 and a representative in the Turkish Grand National Assembly from Kars for three terms beginning in 1941, applauded the state’s leadership: “After hundreds of years

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<sup>35</sup> Mervat Hatem, “Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (May 1992): 231-2. For discussions of Scandinavian state feminism, see Harriet Holter, “Women’s Research and Social Theory,” in *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society*, ed. Harriet Holter (London: Global Books Resources Ltd., 1984): 18-24 and Helga Maria Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power, Essays in State Feminism* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987), especially chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



of waiting and striving, Turkish women have been *enabled* to realize their potential.”<sup>38</sup> In the wake of the Ottoman constitutional period (1908-1918), she explained, there were progressives, both in and outside the government that worked towards advancing women’s rights. The difference was the will of Mustafa Kemal to bring about meaningful reforms.<sup>39</sup> Nermin Abadan, a lawyer and future professor at Boğaziçi University, argued in 1949 that the 1926 code gave women their rightful place in society, and that Atatürk’s reforms were carried out for the purpose of establishing equality for women in public life.<sup>40</sup> Ferhunde Özbay further claimed that in the early Republic, more than in any other point, women’s subordinate position in Turkish society was recognized as one of the most pressing issues facing the new nation by both the government and academics.<sup>41</sup> That women were granted the right to vote in municipal elections in 1930 and national elections in 1934, given access to free elementary education, and the statistical indicators for women’s representation in fields such as law and medicine increased sharply indicates the success of Atatürk’s program to proponents of the reforms.<sup>42</sup> The lack success of the Kemalist programs in rural areas was ascribed to deep-rooted conservative and Islamic tradition that remained in such areas, which were presented as antithetical to the Kemalist

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<sup>38</sup> Tezer Taşkıran, *Women in Turkey* (İstanbul: Redhouse Yayınevi, 1976): 49 (emphasis added).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Nermin Abadan, “Türk Kadınının Hukukî Durumu,” *Kadin Gazetesi*, November 14, 1949.

<sup>41</sup> Özbay, introduction to *Women, Family, and Social Change in Turkey*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Zehra Arat, “Turkish Women and the Republican Reconstruction of Tradition,” in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East*, eds. Fatma Müge Göçek and Shiva Balaghi (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1994): 57-8. Arat cites Ayşe Öncü, “Uzman Mesleklerde Kadını,” in *Türk Toplumunda Kadın*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (İstanbul: Araştırma, Eğitim, Ekin Yayınları, 1982): 253-267, Tezel Taşkıran, *Cumhuriyetin 50. Yılında Türk Kadın Hakları* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Kültür Müsteşarlığı, Başbakanlık Basımevi, 1973) and Emel Doğramcı, *Status of Women in Turkey*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Ankara: Meteksan Co., Inc., 1989) as examples that advance such arguments.

modernization reforms.<sup>43</sup> The problem was thus not with the state, but with individuals who were unwilling or unable to countenance the reforms.

Contemporary scholars of Turkey have often been content with conceiving of state feminism as a static concept between the establishment of the Republic and the 1980s. Nükhet Sirman, for example, argues that while feminists in the 1980s inherited their Kemalist mothers' tendency to be active in life outside the home, they also questioned their mothers' "*uncritical stance* with regard to relations within the home, relations which Kemalists had relegated to a 'private' and therefore untouchable space."<sup>44</sup> The implication is that an uncritical stance produced no significant challenges to state feminism until the more iconoclastic protests of feminists in the 1980s. Monolithic constructions of feminism obfuscate the changing dynamics of how women conceived of themselves as individuals and the historical circumstances from which these constructions emerged. This study will explore how women thought about their roles within the Turkish civic order they inhabited and argue that the history of Turkish women's movements is more complex than a periodization that elides women's activity during a point of rupture in Turkish history would lead one to believe. The developments of the 1980s, then were less of a radical break from an unchanging concept than a culmination of the "evolution" that İffet Oruz argued was occurring in the 1950s.

This study will pay particular attention to women's role in the workforce. Since the question of what women's proper role in the workplace was a particularly salient issue, it will analyze discourses of labor in the publication *Kadın Gazetesi*, a politically minded women's newspaper, and seek to situate these discourses into Turkish history

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>44</sup> Nükhet Sirman, "Feminism in Turkey," 27-8 (emphasis added).

more generally. This paper will demonstrate that the period from the late 1940s into the 1950s, when the Democratic Party was popularly conceived of as a viable alternative to Kemal Atatürk's RPP, witnessed a resurgence in discourses of democracy that allowed women a safe space in which their concerns with the Kemalist project could be voiced. Situating women's movements into the wider trajectory of Turkish history can help recognize that what can now be called feminism was not a static concept that can be applied across temporal boundaries, but was one that developed over time.

### **A Note on Sources**

This paper will be drawing significantly from *Kadın Gazetesi*, a publication that was launched in March 1947 by İffet Halim Oruz. The newspaper's official purpose stated: "We publish in order to serve our women's thoughts, views, opinions, feelings, and wishes."<sup>45</sup> Hatice Özen argues that *Kadın Gazetesi* was unique among newspapers of its time, as it had a clear political orientation aiming specifically at issues affecting women.<sup>46</sup> Later newspapers in the multi-party period like *Kadın Sesi* (founded in 1957)<sup>47</sup> followed the path set by *Kadın Gazetesi* and continued to address problems women faced in Turkey. One of the main contentions of this study is that the newspaper was less of a platform for regurgitating praise of the state's programs, and more of a site upon which ideas could be debated and fleshed out, both by those writing for the newspaper and those reading. *Kadın Gazetesi* was thus a way for women to insert themselves into public discourse. Since the Democratic Party stressed the ability of citizens to voice their own

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<sup>45</sup> Hatice Özen, *Tarih Süreç İçinde: Türk Kadın Gazete ve Dergileri (1868 – 1990)* (İstanbul: Graphis, 1994): 42.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>47</sup> Other publications from the 1950s include *Kadının Güzelliği* (1951), *Demokrat Kadın* (1954), and *Kadın Dünyası* (1958). *Ibid.*, 49.

opinions, this particular historical moment was ripe for new publications that voiced citizen concerns.

*Kadın Gazetesi* does have its limitations and should not be taken as a source that is representative of all Turkish women. Ayşe Asker has studied the demographics of female journalists in Turkey and her work is useful for understanding the writers, themselves, as well as the audiences they targeted. Of 180 female writers Asker examined, 87.8% were between the ages of 20 to 40 and were typically from the middle class.<sup>48</sup> 34.4% had attained a university degree (compared to 26.7% that had earned a high school degree and 14.4% that had completed middle school) and 68.7% of the writers' husbands had earned a university degree.<sup>49</sup> And indeed, *Kadın Gazetesi* featured articles written by members of Parliament, lawyers, and notable figures of Ottoman women's movements.<sup>50</sup>

When this study refers to "women," then, it is admittedly referring to a relatively small number of middle class women. Many of the writers for *Kadın Gazetesi* ostensibly lived in urban areas and we are left with clues about how these writers thought about differences between cities and rural villages. Oruz wrote in 1950, for example, that İstanbul "is a province possessing a superior culture" compared to the rest of the country.<sup>51</sup> These demographics indicate that *Kadın Gazetesi* was generally written by and

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<sup>48</sup> Ayşe Asker, *Türk Basınında Kadın Gazeteciler* (İstanbul: Gazeteciler Cemiyet Yayınları, 1991): 21-8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-1.

<sup>50</sup> İpek Yosmaoğlu, "Our Women Treasures: Early Republican Turkish Women and Their Public Identity," in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, eds. Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007): 213. See, for example, Halide Edib Adıvar, "Kadınlara Dair..." *Kadın Gazetesi*, September 6, 1948 and İffet Halim Oruz, "Talking With Professor Halide Edib Adıvar," *Kadın Gazetesi*, May 8, 1950 for pieces written in part or in full by Halide Edib Adıvar, one of the most influential members of the Ottoman women's movement.

<sup>51</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, "Duty Befalling Our Women During the 1950 Election," *Kadın Gazetesi*, March 27, 1950.

geared towards an educated, urban middle class. Women from this particular segment of society were thus in a position to engage the state-sponsored discourse and their voices were privileged above others in the public discussion about women in Turkish society.

A small number of other scholars have examined the *Kadın Gazetesi* briefly. İpek Yosmaoğlu aptly characterizes the newspaper as “a platform for women actively involved in the Kemalist modernization project to debate and question the roles accorded to them by this project.”<sup>52</sup> A major limitation of Yosmaoğlu’s work, however, is the fact that she limits her analysis to the years between 1947 and 1950. Such a temporal range excludes the initial years of Democratic Party rule, which is a critical juncture in Republican history. Nevertheless, Yosmaoğlu cogently argues that although

“we may be tempted to view the lack of defiance on women’s part as a sign of passive resignation to a state-assigned mission, it is simplistic to say that women who embraced their new role so enthusiastically had no agency in interpreting it.”<sup>53</sup>

I want to develop this point further. The ardent support for the Democratic Party and the corresponding disdain for the RPP provides a powerful space for men and women to make the kinds of claims to which Yosmaoğlu refers.

Another major study is Birsan Banu Okutan’s *Woman and Nation in Turkey*, which discusses the relationship between *Kadın Gazetesi* and state projects in Turkey. Okutan centers her work around the theoretical contribution of Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis in their introduction to the 1989 volume *Woman-Nation-State*. Anthias and Yuval-Davis propose that women have “tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to state practices” in five different (yet not mutually exclusive) ways: as biological reproducers; as reproducers of boundaries of ethnic/national groups;

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<sup>52</sup> Yosmaoğlu, “Our Women Treasures,” 213.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

as participants in the ideological reproduction of the ethnic/national collective and transmitters of culture; as signifiers of national/ethnic differences; and as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that Anthias and Yuval-Davis state that “women are constituted through the state but are also actively engaged in countering state processes,”<sup>55</sup> on the subject of women as mothers in Turkey, Okutan concludes:

“Women are *controlled* not only by being encouraged or discouraged from having children who will become members of various groups. They are also controlled in terms of ‘proper way’ [*sic*] in which they should have them.”<sup>56</sup>

It is nations that “clearly draw the positions that women are able to hold.”<sup>57</sup> In this formulation, it is that state that has a monopoly on agency, and women’s roles are reduced to following the lead of the state. A close reading of the discourse in *Kadın Gazetesi*, however, paints a different picture of the relationship between women and the state.

### **Situating State Feminism in Turkish History**

As noted above, one of the most significant deficiencies of Turkish feminist historiography has been the assumption that Kemalism (and its program for women) was not seriously contested until the 1980s. While it may be true that the 1980s feminist movement presented the most significant outright *challenge* to, and in many ways a rejection of, Kemalism (within a particular framework of a more contemporary North

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<sup>54</sup> Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, introduction to *Woman-Nation-State*, eds. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989): 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Birsan Banu Okutan, *Woman and Nation in Turkey: Kadın Gazetesi (1947-1950) and Kadın Sesi (1957-1960)* (Saarbrücken: Lambert, 2010): 10-11 (emphasis added).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

American and European feminism), it would be a mistake to suggest that women until then did not negotiate their own place within the civic order as it evolved throughout the twentieth century and pursue their own agendas unique to their times.

Critical to this story is the particular historical moment in which women in the late 1940s and early 1950s operated. Erik Zürcher suggests more broadly of the period after the Second World War that the government of İsmet İnönü, the successor to Atatürk's Republican People's Party, had become quite unpopular to a majority of Turkish citizens for a number of reasons.<sup>58</sup> Particularly in the wake of Atatürk's death in 1938, according to Kemal Karpat, the general public had reacted negatively to developments in the RPP, wherein a small group of bureaucrats increasingly exercised power through the party apparatus.<sup>59</sup> The RPP did not fare any better policy-wise: "the benevolent paternalism of the Republican Party no longer corresponded with the needs of any group."<sup>60</sup> Internal RPP discord came to a head in 1945 after bitter debates surrounding a land reform bill. Critics of the bill claimed that it was unconstitutional and would have deleterious economic effects. After it eventually passed in June of 1945, three of the individuals who would eventually establish the Democratic Party, Refik Koraltan, Fuad Köprülü, and Adnan Menderes, were expelled from the RPP. They, along with Celâl Bayar, later established the DP on January 7, 1946.<sup>61</sup>

Initially, there was no sense of anxiety within the RPP surrounding the formation of the Democratic Party. As Feroz Ahmad describes, the founding fathers of the DP were, themselves, Kemalists and largely shared a similar political philosophy with the RPP. As

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<sup>58</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 206. See chapters 11 and 12 of Zürcher's history for a detailed discussion of these reasons.

<sup>59</sup> Karpat, *Turkey's Politics*, 139.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>61</sup> See Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, chapter 6 for a detailed discussion of these events.

a result, the RPP believed that the DP could act as a “token opposition” party that would not present a serious threat to its own political hegemony.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, what did make people take notice of the DP was the rhetoric that it used to distinguish itself from the RPP. Refik Koraltan, for example, argued in the mid 1940s that:

“the most important element in a modern society, which requires careful handling, is, first, and above all, the right to think, speak, write, associate, and express ideas, and finally, to have a guarantee of property and home.”<sup>63</sup>

These words only added fuel to the country’s dissatisfaction with how the RPP handled economic affairs. After World War II, the peasantry was hit particularly hard by Turkey’s economic struggles; because of rising prices and shortages, peasants could not maintain their prewar levels of consumption. The state’s revenue also failed to revert to prewar levels. To rectify the situation, the RPP issued a wealth tax (*varlık vergisi*) that targeted profiteers and businessmen who gained the most from the war economy. The taxes were, however, arbitrarily high and led to complaints from those affected by it.<sup>64</sup> As a result, by 1950 the RPP had alienated itself from virtually every economic sector in Turkey. And indeed, in the election of 1950, the Democrats won 53.35% and 408 seats in the Assembly, while the RPP carried 38.38% of the vote, but only 39 Assembly seats.<sup>65</sup>

Women were not passive in this larger critique of the RPP. While scholars like Arat have claimed that women who were affected by Atatürk’s reforms were unable to critically evaluate them because they “were the first to benefit from *and reverse* [them],”<sup>66</sup> evidence from *Kadın Gazetesi* indicates that women were part of the broader trend of questioning RPP policies. Again, it is important to stress the importance of not reading

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>63</sup> Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics*, 121.

<sup>64</sup> Sarıbay, “The Democratic Party,” 120.

<sup>65</sup> Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, 108-9.

<sup>66</sup> Arat, “Women’s Movements of the 1980s,” 102 (emphasis added).



Republican history backwards; that the Democratic Party would eventually enact repressive measures later into its rule should not alter how we analyze how its message resonated with individuals during the transition to the multiparty period.

This shift is evident in the writings of İffet Halim Oruz, *Kadın Gazetesi*'s future owner and editor. In her 1933 book *Yeni Türkiye'de Kadın* (The New Woman in Turkey), Oruz proclaimed, "In a corner of India, and inside a dark (*izbe*) room, a bony man's eyes flickered and burned in a way I had not seen until now upon hearing of Turks *and the name of Mustafa Kemal*."<sup>67</sup> In this example, the fervor surrounding the newly formed Republic is apparent. Specifically, the new values that impressed the man Oruz met in India were encased in one individual, Mustafa Kemal. His influence was so great that it could serve as an example of a modern state to individuals learning of him for the first time.

Oruz's later pieces in *Kadın Gazetesi* reveal insight on how its writers understood the place of the Democratic Party in Turkey's future and how they juxtaposed it to the RPP era. Oruz wrote an article (significantly in English, as part of *Kadın Gazetesi*'s occasional section designed for international consumption) after the 1950 election, and announced:

"The People's Party lost the election because they did not heed public psychology and could not get out of the habit of enforcing arbitrary treatment. Whereas, the National Party was not favoured because the public was alarmed by its excessive exaggeration in its actions. On the other hand the Democratic Party was able to win public sympathy because they had the courage to eliminate by means of various tactics, the unsuitable elements they had accepted without discrimination into their party at the beginning."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, *Yeni Türkiye'de Kadın*. Ankara: Hakimiyeti Millîye Matbaası, 1933, 19 (emphasis added).

<sup>68</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, "In Democracy," *Kadın Gazetesi*, May 22, 1950.

Oruz indicated her willingness to change her rhetoric to mirror the popular political discourse of the time in this piece. Moreover, that it is a translation of a Turkish article suggests that she wanted people outside of Turkey's borders to understand the changes occurring. She not only supported the Democratic Party after the election, but also castigated Atatürk's own RPP. Oruz even equated the significance of the 1950 election with that of 1934, the first time when women were able to vote. Before the election she argued, "this new election will have no similarity with any election term since 1934...In a single party regime, with the People's Party already having recognized the rights of women, we naturally did not have much to fight for."<sup>69</sup> Now that single party rule had ended, Oruz's commentary suggested that women did have something new to fight for since their opinions had more channels through which they could be articulated. This attitude towards the RPP continues. Oruz says of the period under Atatürk that, "Woman's duty toward's [*sic*] the country at that time, was more of a social kind, i.e. she was called upon to use her rights merely by joining the election. *This does not mean that any other party would not have recognized women's rights.*"<sup>70</sup> Not only does she critique the RPP's program in a manner that many Turkish women writing in the 1980s and 1990s would likely agree with – in Yeşim Arat's words, for example, Kemalist reforms "were neither liberal nor democratic."<sup>71</sup> That Oruz also goes so far as to claim that Atatürk's party was hardly unique in putting to the fore issues related to women's

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<sup>69</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, "Duty Befalling Our Women During the 1950 Election," *Kadın Gazetesi*, March 27, 1950.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

<sup>71</sup> Arat, "Women's Movements of the 1980s," 101.

status is consistent with later feminists' claims that reforms "brought women neither equality nor liberation."<sup>72</sup>

While Oruz's comments in 1933 venerated Atatürk to the point that his influence took on international significance, by 1950, she presented his party in banal terms. Later in the 1980s, Oruz appears to have confirmed her change of heart from the 1950s. She claimed that during the period from 1938 to 1960, "women's organizations striving for other issues outside political life along with handling women's equality and the political process had begun to proliferate."<sup>73</sup> While this proliferation may not have reached its zenith until the 1980s, as the above comments suggest that the period under study was certainly one that saw an active base of women involved in articulating what they believed to be their rights.

This line of thought suggests that Oruz understood that under the banner of a multiparty democracy, avenues for women to enter into public discourse were expanded. In a single party system, few vehicles for expressing dissent existed, especially for those outside of the party bureaucracy, to shape what was on the table in terms of women's rights - especially since the state had closed or absorbed independent women's organizations.<sup>74</sup> What other scholars have perhaps overlooked is the powerful, albeit brief, opportunity that the fervor surrounding the transition to a multiparty system offered women as a means to potentially spread ideas.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>73</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, *Türkiye'de Kadın Devrimi* (İstanbul: Gül Matbaası, 1986): 69.

<sup>74</sup> Examples include *Türk Kadın Birliği* (Turkish Women's Union) and *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* (Child's Protection Society). See Kathryn Libal, "Staging Women's Emancipation: İstanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 31-52.

Another writer, Müfide Barım, addressed similar themes in her article about “an old claim,” the veracity of which could continue to be eroded during DP rule.<sup>75</sup> She outlined the prevailing argument against women’s participation in the labor force – that the home and their children would be neglected. Barım argued instead that by *not* working, women were neglecting their children and the home, because as prices for food and basic necessities rose, a man’s income alone was often insufficient to provide for an entire family. At the end of the article, she underscored her hope for the Democratic Party’s rule, under which the possibilities for a wider effort to elevate women’s honor and expand their potential to work can happen. The way that Barım frames her article is significant; the title of the article was “an old claim,” (*eski bir dâva*), in reference to the position that women should not be working outside of the household. To Barım, it was at the time that the DP was leading the country that this old claim could finally be put to rest and wider possibilities for female labor could proliferate. Again, the optimism of women surrounding the emergence of the DP is clear.

Oruz and Barım’s editorials thus stand in contrast to Birsen Banu Okutan’s argument that between 1947 and 1950, “women did not clearly express their wants. Not surprisingly, the proportion of representation [in parliament] was 1.9% between 1946 and 1950.”<sup>76</sup> As Laura Bier reminds, politics need not only occur on the highest level of government and women who are not directly attached to the state apparatus can still make claims against the state in a variety of ways. While women like Oruz were not members of parliament, their contributions nevertheless continued to shape public discourse on women’s position in Turkish society. One estimate holds that *Kadın Gazetesi* enjoyed a

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<sup>75</sup> Müfide Barım, “Eski bir Dâva,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, December 11, 1950.

<sup>76</sup> Okutan, *Woman and Nation*, 25.

subscribership of three to four thousand households in İstanbul. Oruz, herself, was active in making phone calls to boost the newspaper's readership.<sup>77</sup> This is not a particularly large number by itself, but the fact remains that there did exist a network of women, primarily in İstanbul, that were exposed to similar ideas and had a space available to negotiate and spread these ideas.

The assertion that women were unable to clearly express their own visions and prescriptions for women's place within Turkish politics and society thus does not stand up to the evidence found in *Kadın Gazetesi*. Women did have clear ideas about the roles they should be playing within the civic order. It is important to bear in mind that women in the 1940s and 1950s were still operating under various constraints that limited what demands they could make. Organizational structures were not yet fully operative in the 1940s and 1950s that allow women to coalesce and make claims that deal with specific issues, especially since that state had disallowed many autonomous organizations. Again, since the state coopted or closed down a number of influential independent organizations, individuals did not have spaces in which they could mobilize free of state intervention. Deniz Kandiyoti has also argued that popular Islam has represented "a consistent vehicle for popular classes to express their alienation from 'Westernized' elites,"<sup>78</sup> and since the Turkish state tried to construct Islamic populism as antithetical to the "Enlightenment vision of progress," using religious symbolism and space as channels to voice discontent was not a viable option either.<sup>79</sup> Yet this particular time period's state of political flux

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<sup>77</sup> Şemsi Silkim, "Kadın Gazetesi'nin Sahip ve Acar Muhabiri İffet Hanım," *Yeniçağ Gazetesi*, May 29, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, introduction to *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991): 8.

<sup>79</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism, and Women in Turkey," in *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991): 40.

helped to galvanize women to find space in which claims could be made as such spaces began to expand.

### **Negotiation Strategies: What is the Ideal Woman?**

To demonstrate one of this paper's central points, that women were active in contesting their own role within the civic order, the present study will outline forms of contestation through a series of articles that appeared in *Kadın Gazetesi* in 1951, entitled "İdeal Kadın Ne?" (What is the Ideal Woman?). These articles help to highlight the strategies that women were able to use to make claims in ways that, while falling short of calling explicitly for "emancipation" in the vein of later scholars from the 1980s, still sent messages about a desire to alter the place of women in Turkey that would have likely resonated with readers.

In the "İdeal Kadın" series, a number of male public intellectuals were interviewed by the newspaper to offer their insights about what traits, both physically and intellectually, the ideal woman living in postwar Turkey possessed. The opinions offered by the men in the "ideal woman" series were varied, and by no means is in full congruence with other opinions offered in the newspaper. By inserting these articles about men's opinions, the discussions played out in the newspaper introduced a space that helped to further engage both readers and writers into a broader discourse, or at least allowed which male and female ideas to be contested and negotiated. What I want to highlight is how these articles provided a platform through which female writers (and readers) could safely debate public male intellectuals. While the differences between male and female writers' opinions of the ideal woman were subtle, the responses of

Melâhat Gökmen, the series's editor, nevertheless demonstrate points of contention with her male peers. Rather than directly rejecting certain ideas, Gökmen chose to underscore certain points and elide others made by the male interviewees. Silence in this regard is a form of agency; by choosing to not comment on certain ideas while stressing others, Gökmen emphasized which points she wanted her readers to remember.

In many ways, the opinions offered by the men interviewed by *Kadın Gazetesi* reflected the intellectual climate surrounding what was thought to be “the new man” in the Turkish Republic. Women were not the only individuals that were thought to be in need of reform to meet the needs of the modernized Republic. Duygu Köksal explains how the weekly newspaper that was published from 1934 to 1979, *Yeni Adam* (The New Man), also gave advice for how Turkish men could integrate themselves into the nascent Republic's prescribed gender roles. Edited by İstanbul writer and politician İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, *Yeni Adam* “emphasized a ‘new man’ that is industrious, sociable, a realist, and that combines intelligence and practicality.”<sup>80</sup> It also stressed the importance of men's willingness to allow room in public and social life for women, indicating that it was not enough that women be convinced to enter the public sphere, but that men also needed to be shown the value of gender diversity in social life.<sup>81</sup>

The men interviewed in *Kadın Gazetesi* appear to be of the *Yeni Adam* mold. Gökmen outlined some of the characteristics that make them “ideal.” One man that was interviewed, Necip Mirkelâmoğlu, was described as “a cultured individual” whose grasp of “a beautiful language” spurred Gökmen to want to speak with him further (*kendisinden*

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<sup>80</sup> Duygu Köksal, “Yeni Adam ve Yeni Kadın: 1930’lar ve 1940’larda Kadın, Cinsiyet, ve Ulus,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 51 (March 1998): 32.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

*güzel bir lisanla bahsedince, anketimize iştirak etmesini rica ettim).*<sup>82</sup> This emphasis on language was also presented at the beginning of Gökmen's article with Kerim Beşerler, a lawyer. Beşerler, wrote Gökmen, "spoke with a great maturity and dignity."<sup>83</sup> With this learnedness, these men were able to acquire well-paying jobs – they worked as doctors, lawyers, professors, and economists, positions that ensconced them in the position of breadwinner for the family. Each man was also married and had a women, and in some cases children, to provide for. All of these factors combine to form the idealized man that Köksal described: one who was both industrious yet well versed in the use of graceful language and worked to support his family.

The opening article in the "*Büyük Anketimiz*" (Our Big Survey) featured an interview with an Education Ministry staffer from İzmir.<sup>84</sup> In the interview, Kemal Özertem argued that any notion of the ideal woman changes in every era and in every culture. What constituted a moral life thus changes over time. This dynamic set the stage for the contemporary social climate from which the ideal woman could emerge. He further explained that there were differences between what the "cultured man" and the male "worker" sought in a woman. For the worker, the ideal woman must clean the laundry, among other household chores; cook food; wear the veil; stay at home; and "submit to his every wish" (*her arzusuna boyun eğecek bir kadın*). The alternative was for women to be as "cultured" as the idealized man that Özertem envisioned; working

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<sup>82</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, "Sizce İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır? Genç Tüccarlarımızdan, İktisat Fakültesi Mezunu Necip Mirkelâmoğlu'nun Güzel Düşünceleri," *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 15, 1951.

<sup>83</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, "Sizce İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır? Avukat Kerim Beşerler ile bir Konuşma," *Kadın Gazetesi*, November 5, 1951.

<sup>84</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, "İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır?..M. Kütüphane Müdürü Kemal Özertemle Bir Konuşma," *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 1, 1951.



class women, ostensibly, could not achieve such a sophisticated outlook without also changing their class identity.

This point of view is also posited by Dr. Cihat Seçkin, a military doctor, who posed that, for him, the ideal woman was one who created happiness in the house.<sup>85</sup> He elaborated on this statement to argue that the woman who brought happiness was not necessarily beautiful. Rather, “culture is necessary” for the ideal woman. These two arguments underline the fundamentally bourgeois nature of Özerem’s and Seçkin’s ideas about relationships between men and women, and it is particularly noteworthy that they chose to associate the working class with men and women that hold society back. The ‘correct’ way to integrate oneself into the new civic order for these two men was through upper class values; lower class workers, on the other hand, latched onto anachronistic ideas that impeded progress.

Kerim Beşerler, a lawyer, articulated that his vision of the ideal woman was one who put taking care of the home above all else; happiness for both the family and for the nation, he claimed, came from women’s management of the household.<sup>86</sup> It was only if a woman was able to complete her household tasks that she could work; Beşerler qualified this by claiming that if this condition was met, work was not just a proposition for women, but a necessity. Nevertheless, the possibility that women can enter the workforce is contingent upon first tending to household chores.

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<sup>85</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, “Sizce İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır? Doktor Cihad Seçkin İle Bir Görüşme,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, December 24, 1951.

<sup>86</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, “Sizce İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır? Avukat Kerim Beşerler ile bir Konuşma,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, November 5, 1951.



Figure 1 (left) and Figure 2 (right): Milli Kütüphane Müdürü Kemal Özertem and Dr. Cihat Seçkin



Figure 3 (left) and Figure 4 (right): Necip Mirkelâmoğlu and Kerim Beşerler

The next man to be interviewed was Necip Mirkelâmoğlu, an economics professor and lawyer. According to Mirkelâmoğlu, the ideal woman was one whose

primary responsibilities were tending to social and national life.<sup>87</sup> He qualified this statement, however, by suggesting that “the field in which women will play the most positive role is education.” While *Kadın Gazetesi* ran many articles about the teaching profession in particular, it did not, at the same time, pigeonhole women’s career opportunities into a single category. Teaching as a profession to Mirkelâmoğlu was not necessarily for the benefit of the woman herself or for the support of her family, but for the support of the nation. Again, women’s labor was devalued when it is taken out of the context of its value for the state.<sup>88</sup>

What is perhaps more telling than the men’s opinions is how the female editor of the “big survey,” Melâhat Gökmen, reacted in the articles and in her final response piece at the end of the series. She agreed with the men she interviewed that in order for women to “not only be an ornament and a vehicle for pleasure” (*sadece bir süs ve zevk vasıtası olmadığı için*), she must completely separate herself from prior conceptions of womanhood.<sup>89</sup> While this statement alone is hardly groundbreaking, what is of interest is how Gökmen characterized the “*geçmiş senelerden*” woman (woman from past years). Class connotations reverberate strongly throughout Gökmen’s conception of what past womanhood entailed; the Ottoman woman, Gökmen averred, was an “ornamental puppet” that lived between four walls and was occupied only with childrearing and “the pursuit of luxury.”<sup>90</sup> When we consider Kemal Özertem’s comments that ideas about morals change over time (despite him still offering a heavily classed vision of what the

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<sup>87</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, “Sizce İdeal Kadın Nasıl Olmalıdır? Genç Tüccarlarımızdan, İktisat Fakültesi Mezununu Necip Mirkelâmoğlu’nun Güzel Düşünceleri,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 15, 1951.

<sup>88</sup> On this point, see in Nilüfer Çağatay and Yasemin Nuhoğlu-Soysal, “Ululaşma Süreci ve Feminizm Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Düşünceler,” in *Kadın Bakış Açısından: 1980’ler Türkiye’sinde Kadınlar*, ed. Şirin Tekeli (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 1990): 301-311.

<sup>89</sup> Melâhat F. Gökmen, “İdeal Kadın, Nasıldır? Büyük Anketimizin Neticesini Veriyoruz...” *Kadın Gazetesi*, December 31, 1951.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

new modern ideal Turkish woman entailed), Gökmen's comment indicates that the new women was fundamentally opposite from what was, in her opinion, the decadent (upper class) woman of the Ottoman period. While Seçkin and Özertem may have altered the terms with which we think about what the ideal (upper class) woman entails, the fact remains that she is nevertheless part of the bourgeois class. To Gökmen, one of the fundamental traits of the Ottoman women was her tendency to stay indoors and not seek employment beyond the stipend that was given to her from her husband. This was in sharp contrast to Beşerler's ideal women, who put child rearing and household maintenance above all else. There was a clear tension between Gökmen's prescriptions for what the ideal Turkish woman should be and those of her male peers, specifically as it related to class connotations. Gökmen especially appeared far less comfortable calling for women's unilateral appropriation of upper class sensibilities.

What Gökmen chose to emphasize most from the interviews was work and public life, albeit in a more abstract sense. Gökmen, unlike Mirkelâmoğlu for example, did not specifically limit women's work possibilities to those sanctioned by the state – education, law, medicine, etc. She articulated how women should not forgo their femininity while working (*çalışmalarında kadınlığından kaybetmesin*) and left open the possibility of women entering any number of different professions. Ideal womanhood and work to Gökmen thus need not have been mutually exclusive concepts. Women could maintain their femininity while still working; an idea that appears to be incongruous with the Kemalist assertion that women in the workforce would need to discard their gender identities.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> On this point, see Durakbaşa, "Kemalism as Identity Politics," 143-52.

Rather than engaging directly with the ideas that are offered by the men that she interviews, in her own concluding article, Gökmen emphasized certain points while she failed to mention others at all. This strategy was a way that women like Gökmen could selectively emphasize certain points, communicate to readers what points to internalize and, through omission, which not to. All forms of argument and contestation need not be direct; in a moment when women were still in the process of negotiating their place in the Republic and enjoying relatively new rights, it might not have necessarily been in their best interest to confront male intellectuals directly. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women were inactive with trying to better their position in society. Gökmen made clear the value of women's labor and her scorn for forcing women to stay within the household; this opinion was certainly not wholly congruent with that of her male peers. Yet by appropriating the value placed on women's labor, for example, Gökmen was able to find a safe discursive space in which she could make claims against writers like Beşerler, who did not ascribe a similar need and importance to women's place in the workforce.

## **Labor**

As has been discussed above, bringing women into the workforce was a central tenet of Turkish state feminism. Because the economic conditions of the period under study were particularly volatile, the subject was of significant concern to writers in *Kadın Gazetesi*. With the above discussion of strategies that Melâhat Gökmen utilized, female writers made similar claims about how women's labor should be treated within the broader economic climate of the time. While scholars in the 1980s and 1990s claimed

that women in the 1940s and 1950s could not come to critique state policy because they were the first to benefit from such policy,<sup>92</sup> writers in *Kadın Gazetesi* were far more concerned with contemporary economic concerns than with abstract loyalties to a political philosophy.

The state's broad economic policy after 1931 fell under the term *devleçilik* (statism). *Devleçilik* was neither fully socialist nor fully capitalist; private ownership remained the backbone of economic life, though the state assumed responsibility for operating industries that the private sector could not support on its own.<sup>93</sup> The statism policy did not engender positive results for many Turks. Berch Berberoğlu's analysis of the RPP's economic program leads him to conclude that:

“The super-exploitation of the working masses in the cities and rural areas persisted under the Kemalist regime... Workers continued to generate high rates of surplus value which was appropriated by the state and the national industrial bourgeoisie, resulting in their enrichment at the expense of the masses who lived in extreme poverty.”<sup>94</sup>

And indeed, particularly during the Second World War, Turkey's GDP dropped sharply and did not return to its 1939 figure until 1950. The standard of living in Turkey also did not recover to its pre-war level until the 1950s.<sup>95</sup> The war economy was typified by black market buying and selling of essential items on top of shortages and rising prices.<sup>96</sup> The harsh economy was one of the central points that the Democratic Party had used to criticize the RPP; Oruz argued in 1950 that the RPP's “program and principles leave

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<sup>92</sup> Arat, “Women's Movements of the 1980s,” 102, for example.

<sup>93</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 197.

<sup>94</sup> Berch Berberoğlu, *Turkey in Crisis: From State Capitalism to Neo-colonialism* (London: Zed Books, 1982): 58.

<sup>95</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 199.

<sup>96</sup> Sarıbay, “The Democratic Party, 120.

people who will take employment in need (*muhtaçtır*),” clearly linking economic struggles to inadequate policy measures from the ousted party.<sup>97</sup>

In 1949, one *Kadın Gazetesi* writer, Hasene Ilgaz, drew a direct link between contemporary economic hardships and the war:

“All of us know that the First and Second World Wars wore out (*yıpratmış*) families, life was complicated and today’s society became troubled as a result. Therefore, in today’s society, unhappiness, like a sickness, can be found in abundance. From this sickness, many need to work for themselves and to support their families.”<sup>98</sup>

The RPP considered the small segment of the upper class that benefitted during the war to be “the standard-bearers of a new and modern society” and consequently suppressed the labor movement that tried to check the elite’s power with laws that resembled those passed by fascist Italy.<sup>99</sup> Again, this was not lost on the “worn out” individuals, who increasingly developed an image of the RPP “as the representative of a haughty and oppressive reform-minded elite which was out of touch with the average Turk.”<sup>100</sup>

Though women were able to enjoy a buttressed position in the workforce under the RPP and many of the writers came from the middle class, how women negotiated the issue of labor should be read within this larger economic context. The middle class was not immune to the volatile post-war climate in Turkey. In addition to Ilgaz’s comments, Lamia Onat, a female judge writing in *Kadın Gazetesi* in 1949, framed her discussion of the state of business women in these terms:

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<sup>97</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, “İstanbul’dan Memlekete ve Âleme Bir Bakış,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, July 3, 1950.

<sup>98</sup> Hasene Ilgaz, “Veremli İşçiler için Hükûmetten Bir Dilek,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 10, 1949.

<sup>99</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 200.

<sup>100</sup> Frank Tachau, “The Republican People’s Party, 1945-1980,” in *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey*, eds. Martin Heger and Jacob M. Landau (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991): 104.

“Woman must work because there are too many things to be done and not enough population [*sic*] to do it... Woman will work because the financial crisis throughout the world forces her to be a source of income.”<sup>101</sup>

Onat specifically cited relevant contemporary concerns for why women should take up positions in the labor force: that women must work because the population was not large enough to sufficiently perform needed tasks without including women and that hard economic times underscored the need to have women in the workforce. Onat was also able to link these concerns to a failure of the state to allow women this opportunity to help their families:

“Although our society admits a perfect equality between men and women, we feel it necessary, now and then, to defend and protect some of the rights regarding women, and we believe that this subject concerns the mass rather than a group.”<sup>102</sup>

The deleterious result of women’s given rights not being upheld is a “moral imbalance.” If younger women are exposed to a society where women cannot find work, Onat warns, the next generation may retreat into the harem. In this argument, Onat was able to reinforce the urgency that economic problems caused the average family while using the state’s own language of “perfect equality” and anxieties about the harem to legitimize her claim. What this example illustrates is that explicitly objecting to the patriarchal structures of state feminism was not a *sine qua non* for contentious claims making. Women like Onat responded to contemporary concerns by working within the language of the system and to advance her arguments. She had a clear understanding of what she wanted from the state, and used its own language of equality to support her argument.

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<sup>101</sup> Lamia Onat, “Responsibilities Regarding Business Women and the Maintenance of the Rights of Women,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, September 12, 1949.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*



*The Language of Labor*

Yiğit Akın has argued that the period between the late 1940s and 1950s was a critical historical moment in the development of working class consciousness in Turkey and that language was a specifically important component to this development.<sup>103</sup> His work is useful for understanding how Turks were able to make claims within this economic environment. After the Trade Union Act of 1947 made workers' organizations legal, such groups expanded widely and became active in working class politics across Turkey. Between 1948 and 1963, trade union membership increased by almost six times, though the total number still represented a marginal proportion of the working class population. Unions were able to make significant inroads among particularly in the railroading, coalmining, local transportation, textile, public utility, and tobacco manufacturing industries.<sup>104</sup> Akın suggests that historians must also look beyond structural changes to account for the making of the Turkish working class. He stresses that "using the language of equality, justice, and human rights, workers appealed for improvement in their status both at the workplace and within society at large."<sup>105</sup>

While Akın primarily focuses on male workers, women too were part of the discursive shift. A relevant example in *Kadın Gazetesi* to illustrate this point appeared in 1949. 152 teachers, who were classified as in a state of "bachelorship" were transferred to

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<sup>103</sup> Yiğit Akın, "The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics in Early Republican Turkey: Language, Identity, and Experience," *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 54 (2009): 167. For discussions of economic developments in this period more generally, see William Hale, *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Çağlar Keyder, *State & Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987); and Şevket Pamuk, "Economic Change in Twentieth Century Turkey: Is the Glass More Than Half Full?", in *The Cambridge History of Turkey IV: Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

different locations (often from urban areas to rural areas).<sup>106</sup> The main point of contention, according to the editorial, was that the use of the term “bachelorship” as a metonym for “single” did not sufficiently account for the fact that those teachers chosen to be transferred would have had to leave behind other family members in the absence of a spouse. When we consider the emphasis placed on the nuclear family by Kemalism,<sup>107</sup> Oruz’s criticisms become all the more provocative. Other articles in *Kadın Gazetesi* pay particular attention to the hardships that single women face,<sup>108</sup> and in this example, Oruz turned the state’s discourse surrounding the importance of the family on its head. In a climate where single women (and men) were devalued by virtue of their marital status, we can see how discourses surrounding labor were appropriated to argue for advancing the rights of women that were otherwise marginalized by state-sponsored labor policies.

While the state’s idealized family elided linkages between extended families in favor of the nuclear family structure, Oruz argued that that state’s definition of a fungible employee is inadequate for managing the complexities surrounding the diversity of women living in Turkey. Teachers that were described as “bachelors” were thought to have been expendable because of their marital status. If women were not in a position to support the family, it appears that the state had little desire to see to it that they be able to establish a permanent residence. Kıvanç Kılınç’s study of domesticity in early Republican Ankara demonstrates that the household was a gendered site; “the ‘modern house’ was identified in the republican imaginary with contemporary life,” in that the

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<sup>106</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, “The Question of the 152 Teachers and the Points Which Concern Our Women in General,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, November 28, 1949.

<sup>107</sup> Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family, and Fertility: 1880-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): chapter 7.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Nerime Doürul, “Eski Türkler’de ve İslâmiyette Kadın ve Aile Hukuku,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, March 7, 1949; Gül Karlıdağ, “Antidemokratik Kanunlar ve Fuhuş,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, September 11, 1950; and İffet Halim Oruz, “İşçi Kadınların bir Dileği,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, April 9, 1951.

gender roles that men and women played in the house mirrored those they were expected to play in public life.<sup>109</sup> To the state, if women could not tend to their gender roles in the home, what use was having a stable home? Without a nuclear family to care for, the home was easily replaceable for single women. The discourses of equality and justice noted by Akin as they related to this issue were certainly at work when Oruz wrote:

“We believe that it is quite proper that the İstanbul Teachers Association should take the matter up, as *the question is not a matter of man or woman* but decidedly a question of securing *a proper working* of the transfer business of the teachers.”

This, she concluded, was necessary because “under the Republic...man and woman have equal rights.”<sup>110</sup> Again, the rights of equality promised by the state (but not, in actuality, delivered) were at the fore of how Oruz framed her argument.

*Kadın Gazetesi* was also concerned with the ability of female teachers to provide for themselves after they had retired. That this concern addressed the livelihoods of women after they had completed their service to the state is significant for precisely that reason. If Kemalist reforms were concerned overwhelmingly with women while they were in a public position, advocacy for women’s ability to care for themselves after retreating out of public life recognized that the state had insufficiently provided care for women that had exited from the public sphere into the private sphere. Halise Alpay, writing on this issue, described the “miserable spirit” (*perişan bir ruh*) that retired teachers found themselves in, and placed the onus of developing a plan and a cure (*tedbir ve çare*) for rectifying this situation upon the teacher’s union.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, it was the responsibility of the state to deliver its promises of equality and allow the union to carry

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<sup>109</sup> Kılınç, “Constructing Women for the Republic,” 123.

<sup>110</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, “The Question of the 152 Teachers” (emphasis added).

<sup>111</sup> Halise Alpay, “Kadın Öğretmen ve Emekli Sandığı Tasarısı,” *Kadın Gazetesi*, March 14, 1949.

out a solution. Alpay argued that retired female teachers were subject to different treatment than their husbands, and then rhetorically asked upon what principles this treatment was founded and with what concept of rights the was situation created.

This shift in rhetoric is significant in that it placed the agency to create a comprehensive plan with the women, themselves, while at the same time it argued that the problematic status of retired women also needed attention from the state to uphold the rights it was supposed to have guaranteed to women. The retired teachers, claimed Alpay, needed the Grand National Assembly's reliance on high moral aptitude and love of justice (*Büyük Millet Meclisinin yüksek adaletine ve hakseverliğine*) in addition to women themselves paying attention to the issue. Again, the problem that Alpay identified was couched in terms of both the ability of female agency to produce desirable reform as well as the state's responsibility to uphold justice and fairness. The way that Alpay contextualized her argument demonstrates that she, and other women in organized labor associations for teachers, had a clear expectation of fairness from the state and well-defined opinions about the failure of the state to match its discourse with tangible policy measures.

Another example involved an article lobbying for a more reliable form of health care for women that were either working and had fallen ill or that were retired and in need of medical attention. The writer, Hasese Ilgaz, again framed the issue at the beginning of her article in terms of what was just by claiming that the measure was necessary "for the restoration of the prosperity of the *government's workers*."<sup>112</sup> Ilgaz did not literally mean those who work for the government, but was instead referring to

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<sup>112</sup> Hasese Ilgaz, "Hastalık ve Analık Sigortası: Çalışan İşçiyi Hasta Olmadan Önce İşverenin Koruması Gerekir...", *Kadın Gazetesi*, December 26, 1949 (emphasis added) (*hükümetlerinin işçileri refaha kavuşturması*).

workers who should be protected under the auspices of the state. She then went on to describe the “lamentable” (*acınacak*) conditions to which many factory workers were subject – inadequate access to doctors and unsanitary working conditions, among other things. Of note is Ilgaz’s choice of words; she used the phrase “job providers” (*iş verenler*) throughout the rest of the article to describe those affected and did not return to the issue of the state’s role. By suggesting that these workers fall under the auspices of the state at the beginning of the article (even if they are not public sector workers), however, Ilgaz was able to associate failures of employers in the private sector to protect its workers with a failure of the state to oversee such industries. Factories may have provided workers with jobs, but they were still the *government’s* workers and it was the government that was ultimately responsible for ensuring their welfare.

In each example, the state’s own discourses of equality and justice were used against it to call for improved measures for the protection of female workers. In this context, the critiques of the early Republican government adduced by Turkish feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s are salient for understanding that state discourse did not necessarily translate into practice. This was not, however, lost on women who were the supposed benefactors of these discourses nor were they unwilling to engage the state and demand that the plights of working women be addressed. The types of claims making and language used by writers like Ilgaz and Oruz need to be read within their own particular historical moment, just as the language surrounding emancipation articulated by later generations of Turkish women too need to be situated within broader historical trends.

While it is true that the writers in *Kadın Gazetesi* were generally from the middle and upper classes, these women were nevertheless part of the Turkish labor force and the

problems which they described affected their own interests in addition to individuals from the lower class. That class certainly shaped their opinions (and allowed them a space to make claims vis-à-vis the state that may not have been open to lower class women) is not necessarily an invalidation the significance of the writers' claims. While there is undoubtedly a hint of paternalism present in these articles, the sources still reflect the opinions of working women – for it is not as though the writers in *Kadın Gazetesi* were not, themselves, also workers.

The distinction between the strategy of demanding justice from the state and the calls for emancipation that marked later generations of Turkish women are clear, but both are transgressive nonetheless. It is also important to again stress that these debates occurred at a particular historical moment when confidence in the Republican People's Party was waning and historically specific economic conditions gave rise to increasing dissatisfaction among the people. Deniz Kandiyoti's seminal 1988 article, "Bargaining with Patriarchy" may be useful to consider in this context. Kandiyoti argues that Turkish women bargain their submissiveness in exchange for stability, security, and respect. Because women had historically not engaged in paid labor and options for self-sufficiency were few, Turkish women did not necessarily have the same array of options for resistance as women in other contexts. While African women, for example, could threaten to leave their husbands and find independent sources of income, wage labor for Turkish women was still a relatively new phenomenon.<sup>113</sup> How writers in *Kadın Gazetesi* framed their own points of contention with the state can be read as a product of them understanding that women could not, in the period of the 1940s-1950s, entirely abandon the framework which buttressed their own position in Turkish society. At the same time,

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<sup>113</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2 (1988): 275-278.

however, they were not entirely passive objects of state policy. While Jenny White is correct in arguing that Republican reforms obstructed the possibility for women to develop a feminist framework outside of the auspices of the state,<sup>114</sup> *Kadın Gazetesi* articles were active in negotiating and contesting Republican reforms to better protect themselves by finding space within the state's own discourse.

### *Work Inside the Home and Work Outside the Home*

In this climate where more was asked of women in the workforce, *Kadın Gazetesi* articles reflected the increasing tension women felt between balancing their role in the workplace and their role at home. Deniz Kandiyoti suggested in 1997 that Turkish state feminism's push to integrate women into the working world did not come with an equal desire to reform women's lives inside of the private sphere. She further contended that it was only at the time that she was writing that Turkish feminists began to grapple with the issue of a "split between the public and domestic personas of women professionals."<sup>115</sup> Evidence, however, indicates that this critique began well before the 1990s, albeit under a different framework than that of later scholars. Again, women worked within the prevailing state feminist framework rather than creating an entirely new model to improve their own positions in society.

Writers for *Kadın Gazetesi* addressed and engaged the tension that Kandiyoti described between women's role as workers and as keepers of the domestic sphere. From these articles we can glean the strategies of women working within a particular set of

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<sup>114</sup> White, "State Feminism," 158.

<sup>115</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Gendering the Modern: On Missing Dimensions in the Study of Turkish Modernity," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997): 126.

constraints that shape what they can and cannot hope to accomplish. Mualla Anıl's article, "*Çalışan Kadın*" (Working Woman), depicted a rather bleak portrait of the working woman:

When the woman that departs from her home at eight o'clock in the morning returns during the evening, she cannot rest. She organizes the house left in disarray. If it is winter, she burns the stove and prepares dinner. At night, after she has slaved (*didinmeden sonra*) this much, there is no possibility that she will have any joy... If there is a child present, the women's pain is so deep that it is not accepted.<sup>116</sup>

Anıl, far from accepting the dual role of housewife and working woman promoted by the state, drew attention to the hardships born of these duties and engaged the state narrative in a critical tone. Notably, Anıl specifically focused on the time women spent at home and how working life made it difficult for women to balance the two. If we consider the arguments of feminist critics of the 1980s and 1990s that Kemalist reforms did not sufficiently address patriarchal structures of power in the home,<sup>117</sup> Anıl's critique appears decades before later Turkish scholars' criticisms of the same subject and addresses their same concerns. The difference is the terms on which the solution was presented. Anıl proposed that "in order to rest her tired mind, [women] want calmness and leisurely conversation."<sup>118</sup> Further, Anıl argued they must be able to have energy when upon they return home, and because this time at home had constituted an opportunity for men to rest, this same privilege should extend to women as well. Here Anıl directly challenged the gendered division of labor that was present in the private sphere.

The subheading of Anıl's article, *kadınlarımızın düşünce ve görüşleri* (our women's thoughts and opinions) further suggests that Anıl not only wanted to speak for

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<sup>116</sup> Mualla Anıl, "Çalışan Kadın (Kadınlarımızın düşünce ve görüşleri)," *Kadın Gazetesi*, April 12, 1947.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Tekeli, "The Meaning and Limits of Feminist Ideology in Turkey."

<sup>118</sup> Anıl, "Çalışan Kadın."



herself and for the middle class, but to also give a description of what women across class lines experienced in the workplace. While it is true that *Kadın Gazetesi* was generally written by and for middle class women, in this case the newspaper recognized the struggles of marginalized women and brought them to the newspaper's readership's attention. Though the newspaper's readers were most likely to be from the middle class, Anıl constructed these concerns as issues that stretch across classes; the type of situation Anıl described was experienced, albeit in different degrees, across class boundaries. İffet Oruz, in another article from 1951, criticized taxes that levied what she believed to be an excessive sum from unmarried women and cited a meeting hosted by the *Türk Kadınlar Birliği* (Turkish Women's Union) in İstanbul that found unmarried women were generally overworked.<sup>119</sup> Though the newspaper did not print these women's own voices directly, it nevertheless used stories of their struggles in a way that subverted the state sponsored ideal of the working woman who was also the matron of the household and was happy to serve as both.

Similarly, Pakize Berke argued in 1949 that even if a woman works outside of the home, she should still reserve time for helping her husband with raising children and household management.<sup>120</sup> While it is true that in Berke's article she still attached significance to a woman's life at home, she also implicitly asked men to help with household tasks and assumed men's participation in these affairs to be just as natural as any such responsibility that women may have. Women would play a complimentary role in raising the child rather than be the sole caretaker. Her argument also served as a critique of long working hours that women working in factories, for example, often had

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<sup>119</sup> İffet Halim Oruz, "İşçi Kadınların Bir Dileği," *Kadın Gazetesi*, April 9, 1951.

<sup>120</sup> Pakize Berke, "Çalışan Kadının Müşteki Olduğu Durum Nedir?" *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 10, 1949.

to endure that would have otherwise prevented their ability to spend time at home. Though both articles fall short of calling for outright emancipation and tacitly accept certain gender roles, they suggest that if women were expected to work, then they should also be able to enjoy privileges in the home that were not expressly called for by the Kemalist platform.

At the same time, to Berke, a more evenly distributed work load for women was center to what she hoped to accomplish: “If women need a life inside the house, then they cannot perform their tasks in their social lives fully... *Women are a long way from being satisfied with the state of the value given to womanhood.*”<sup>121</sup> The decision of this writer to point out the incompleteness of integrating women into society is telling. Her article constituted a clear challenge to the rhetoric of the state that women’s place had been successfully elevated to match that of men in Turkish society. Both Berke and Anıl tacitly implied that men should assume a greater role in the domestic sphere to help manage the household tasks. Again, even though they did not say this directly nor put it in overt terms, the fact that they introduced this line of reasoning into public discourse is significant. Because the official state program made no such attempt to ask for more of men in the household, these women made their own interpretations of what their rights should be within the civic order.

Further, women were also trying to shape men’s role in the home to better their own condition – a task that was by no means outlined for them under the state program.

We thus may have to reconsider Birsen Banu Okutan’s argument that

“Women cannot be imagined outside of the context of the family. Women’s services to their husbands in the family resemble their services to the nation.

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<sup>121</sup> Pakize Berke, “Çalışan Kadının Müşteki Olduğu Durum Nedir?” *Kadın Gazetesi*, October 10, 1949 (emphasis added).

Obeying the family rules and traditions is [an] act of submitting to the laws, regulations of the state mechanism.”<sup>122</sup>

The evidence from *Kadın Gazetesi* suggests that women were hardly content with “obeying the rules” and contested their role within the family structure.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I have tried to argue that prevailing periodizations of women’s movements in Turkey are insufficient for accounting for the complexities that underlie women’s activity in the labor force during the years of Turkey’s transformation into a multi-party Republic. Women were aware of their own marginalization within the Turkish civic order and used the press as a vehicle to channel their dissatisfaction with their status under the nascent Republic. What set them apart from later feminist scholars in the 1980s, however, is that their arguments were situated within hegemonic Kemalist discourse. Though they did not offer an alternative model for gender relations in the Turkish civic order as scholars of the 1980s did, they were able to find space within the Kemalist framework to unsettle the dominant paradigm of women’s role in society.

With respect to labor specifically, women writing in *Kadın Gazetesi* did not necessarily challenge prevailing gender roles, but instead used the state’s language of equality and justice as a way to frame their arguments. This should still be understood as claims making rather than as an endorsement of the status quo. Contentious politics need not only occur at the highest level of government, and despite the fact that women in the 1940s and 1950s were not as overtly critical of the state as later women would be, they

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<sup>122</sup> Okutan, *Woman and Nation*, 20-1.

still had their own concerns about how women were treated under the state and used the outlets available to them at the time to express these concerns.

This study has focused specifically on labor, though more research is needed on other aspects of women's lives during the transition to the multiparty system: childrearing, health, and marriage, to name but a few. Such research will help to further understand the development of feminist thought in Turkey throughout the twentieth century. By tracing the evolution of how women have understood certain issues, the concept of feminism can be understood less in monolithic terms, but more as a process that has developed over time.

Periodization as a means of tracing history in relation only to points of specific changes, as the dominant paradigm of Turkish women's movements does, overlooks the ways that women between points of rupture understood themselves and their relation to the state. This study has tried to demonstrate that state feminism was not a stable concept to these women, and that the government's program was very much a topic that was contested and debated. Periodizations that elide these women's voices because they did not call for an entirely iconoclastic alternative fail to capture these historical developments. By taking this type of critical approach to the construction of periodizations, scholars can better understand the dynamism in opinions surrounding issues like state feminism that contributed to more current developments in women's movements in Turkey and elsewhere.

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